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A survey on the income of migratory workers located in South Texas during the winter of 1956-57 was presented. In 446 households surveyed, there were 1,334 workers; approximately half of these were household heads or their wives. Working wives were a little more than half as numerous as working husbands. Most of the husbands were 45 to 54 years of age. Most of the working wives were 25 to 34 years of age. School children constituted one-fifth of the workers; one-third of the children were under 14 years of age.

Most of the workers were underemployed; they averaged 131 days of work during 1956. Household heads averaged 174 days of work. The unemployment rate at the home base was twice as great as when the workers were on the road.

Earnings averaged $781 per worker and $1,145 per male head of household. Earnings averaged $2,208 per family; this varied closely with the size of the family work force.

Trends toward an improved situation for migratory workers included the permanent movement of migratory workers to other states and reduction of labor surpluses at the home base during the winter; the development of annual workers' plans which correlated movement of the workers with local labor needs during the season; the development of better means of school attendance administration to reduce the loss in educational advantages; and the more careful regulation of transportation, housing, and sanitation to make the living and working conditions of migratory workers conform to acceptable minimum standards.

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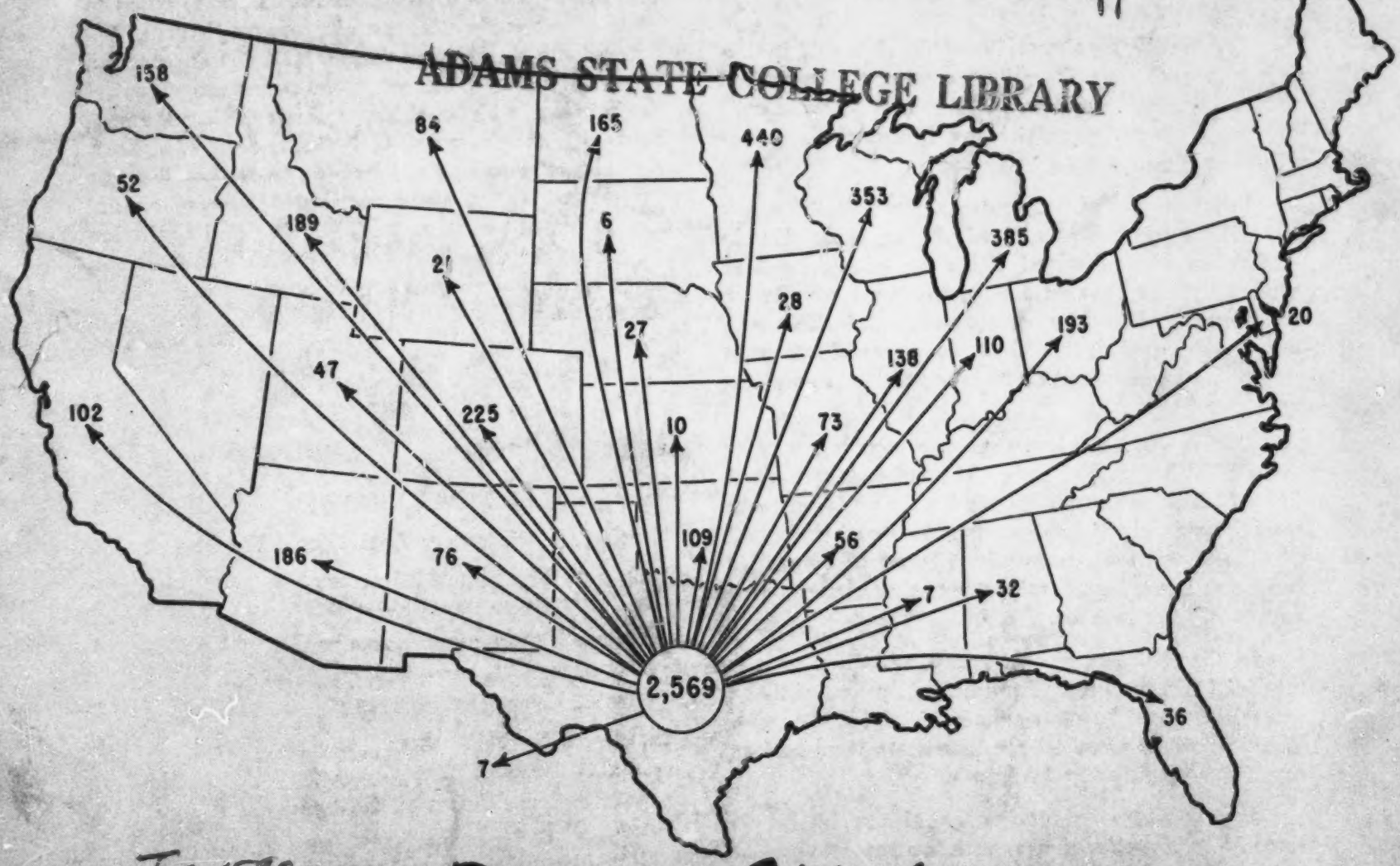

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SUMMARY

A survey was made concerning income of the migratory workers located in South Texas during the winter of 1956-57. The survey was made in six cities with large settlements of migratory farmworkers. These cities were San Antonio, Crystal City, Eagle Pass, Laredo, Weslaco and Robstown.

South Texas migratory workers can be classified into three major groups according to their range of movement. About a third move within the State only and engage mainly in picking cotton. Another third migrate to the sugar beet, vegetable and fruit areas around the Great Lakes, in the Rocky Mountain area or along the Pacific Coast. The third group works in these same out-of-state areas and then returns to engage in the cotton harvest in Texas.

These workers showed considerable skill in timing and planning their itinerary, and haphazard travel was the exception. One-third worked in only one area away from the home base, another one-fourth worked in only two areas.

Practically all were underemployed. They averaged only 131 days of work during 1956. Heads of households averaged 174 days of work. The unemployment rate at the home base was twice as great as while they were on the road. This was despite the fact that half of them, mainly women and children, were out of the labor market completely at the home base.

During 1956, the average earnings per worker were $781, but male heads of households averaged $1,145. Average earnings per family varied closely with the size of the family work force and averaged $2,208. Less than one-fourth of this was earned at the home base; hence, migratory labor was a major source of their income.

In the 446 households surveyed, there was a total of 1,334 workers. Approximately half of these were household heads or their wives (49 percent). Working wives were only a little more than half as numerous as working husbands.

Approximately three-fourths of the husbands were 25 to 55 years of age, with the largest number being in the 45 to 54 age group. Most of the working wives were 25 to 34 years of age. Apparently the wives reduce their participation in field work as they grow older. Women over 55 made up only 7 percent of the workers among wives and female heads, while 21 percent of the males were in that age group.

One-fifth of the workers were school children at the time of the survey. Boys outnumbered girls by about 25 percent; apparently, some girls of school age did not do migratory work. One-third of the school youth who worked were under 14 years of age, 52 of the boys and 31 of the girls.

Several major trends are working toward an improved situation for migratory workers. They are (1) permanent movement of migratory workers to other states and reduction of labor surpluses at the home base during the winter; (2) development of annual workers' plans which correlate movement of the workers with local labor needs during the season; (3) development of better means of school-attendance administration so as to reduce the loss in educational advantages; and (4) more careful regulation of transportation, housing and sanitation so as to bring the living and working conditions of these people more in line with acceptable minimum standards.

COVER

South Texas Migrants, 1956. (Map courtesy Agricultural Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.)

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INCOMES OF MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

WILLIAM H. METZLER and FREDERIC O. SARGENT*

EACH YEAR FARM WORKERS FROM SOUTH TEXAS migrate to more than 30 states in the Nation to supply labor needed to cultivate and harvest a wide variety of crops. The position of these workers in the labor market is highly precarious. Changes in production areas and in harvesting methods and competition from other sources of labor, tend to shift the areas of work, to reduce the length of the work season and to curtail the demand for their labor.

The sugar beet companies and cotton producers' organizations that initiated and promoted the use of migatory labor are still active but on a reduced scale. These organizations are looking forward to the time when they need not be dependent on a large seasonal labor force. Yet there are numerous smaller operators in the work areas who will still be dependent on annual seasonal labor supplies and who do not have the organization or finances to conduct recruitment campaigns. The role of State Employment Services in facilitating the seasonal movement of workers is certain to increase, Figure 1.

The agricultural workers who migrate are commonly referred to as Mexicans or Latin-Americans (1).[1] Actually, almost three-fourths of them are native-born U. S. citizens.

These workers formerly traveled from South Texas with a crew leader who made their job contacts; now 60 percent of them travel in family groups in their own cars and make their own work arrangements.

The families of these workers are large, 6.5 members. More than half of the migrants are children below legal working age. It has been the custom among these people that all children should help in the tasks that the family are doing. The work season in the northern states begins a month or more before the school term closes in the spring and it ends several months after school has opened in the fall. As a result of their work patterns and the irregular schooling which it necessitates, practically all the children were educationally retarded.

The size of the family is associated with the need to migrate. When the family becomes too large for the earnings of one worker to support them all, he looks for work in which other members can contribute to the family income. Conversely, families quit migrating when enough members obtain local employment and it no longer pays them to migrate. The steady employment they obtain is as likely to be found in one of the work areas as at the home base.

PURPOSE AND METHOD OF STUDY

The economic status of migratory workers has been a problem for several decades. Although they have become an essential part of the American agricultural economy, they have had a very small share in the national prosperity, the high levels of living and other advantages associated with American life. They are leaving seasonal farmwork as fast as other opportunities become available, yet this type of work must be done. These people are unable to indicate their economic situation except by leaving it. Analyses of their situation need to be made so that programs can be developed to meet their particular problems and give them rewards sufficient to hold them in this line of work or to attract others to it.

The survey upon which this report is based endeavored to find answers to questions concerning incomes of those migratory workers located in South Texas during the winter of 1956-57.

The survey was made in six cities in South Texas with large settlements of migratory farmworkers. These were selected so as to provide a rough cross-section of the South Texas home base area. The cities were San Antonio, Crystal City,

Figure 1. The Texas Employment Commission provides an information service for migratory workers.

*Respectively, agricultural economist, Farm Economics Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture; and formerly assistant professor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Sociology, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

[1]Numbers in parentheses refer to references.

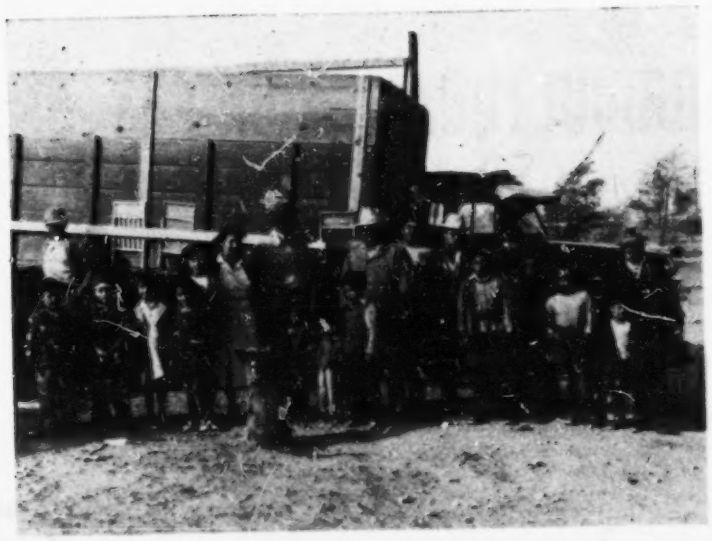

Figure 2. Migratory cotton harvest workers at Reception Center, Lubbock, Texas.

Eagle Pass, Laredo, Weslaco and Robstown. The field work was done during January and the early part of February 1957, a time when the number of migrants in the area is close to the maximum. The number of migrants in the sample cities was affected by the fact that drouth conditions had existed in parts of South Texas since 1951. Consequently, migratory families who needed regular employment during the winter often had to go elsewhere to find it, Figure 2.

The interviewers for the survey were Spanish-speaking Texas youth, many of whom were students or graduates of St. Mary's University at San Antonio. They did not come from the families of migratory farmworkers but had an interest in them because of a common cultural background. This interest was regarded as not being strong enough to bias the results of the survey.

TABLE 1. AVERAGE EARNINGS OF SOUTH TEXAS MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS FOR 1956 AND PER DAY WORKED, BY FAMILY STATUS AND RANGE OF MOVEMENT

Family status and range of movement	Average earnings	
	For year	Per day worked
	— — — Dollars — — —	
All workers	781	5.96
Family status		
Heads		
Male	1,145	6.58
Female	640	4.81
Wives	528	5.93
School youth		
Male	421	5.20
Female	387	4.81
Nonschool youth		
Male	887	5.73
Female	703	5.05
Other persons		
Male	872	5.85
Female	750	5.60
Range of Movement		
Texas only	373	5.16
Outside Texas	907	6.57
Both in and out of Texas	821	5.90

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

The earnings of the workers in the sample group for the 1956 season averaged $781 per worker (Table 1). The average earnings per day worked amounted to $5.96. Male family heads averaged $1,145 during the year, or $6.58 per day worked. School youth and wives tended to bring down the average earnings. The youth added around $400 to the earnings of the household, while wives added somewhat more than $500.

For purposes of comparison, the median income of all workers in the United States in 1956 was $2,432; of residents in urban areas, $2,786; and of people living on farms, $1,029 (2). Male heads of all households had a median income of $3,608; those living on farms, $1,340. Wives earned a median income of $1,117. Incomes of other workers in the household were correspondingly higher than those of members of migrant families.

A classification of workers according to their range of movement showed that interstate workers averaged $907, the highest earnings for the year. Intrastate workers averaged $573, and those who moved both in and out of the State averaged $821. The relative costs of interstate and instate movement were not calculated, but it appears that out-of-state movement pays the migratory worker. Average earnings per day for those working in the State only was $5.16, while it was $6.57 per day for those working outside the State.

Workers received the highest pay in Arizona, California and Washington the lowest in Texas and Colorado (Table 2). More than half of their earnings during 1956 were made outside Texas despite the fact that more than half the days worked were within the State.

RANGE OF EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

Earnings ranged widely from worker to worker in the migrant group. Among male heads of households, 1 in 12 earned more than $2,000 during the year, 1 in 10 earned less than $500 and almost one-half earned less than $1,000 (Table 3). A few wives earned as much as $2,000 but most of them had earnings of less than $500. A few school youth earned $1,000 or more, but most of them earned less than $500.

More than half of the intrastate migrants earned less than $500 as compared with about one-fourth of those who worked outside the State. Six persons who worked only within the State made as high as $2,000. Of those working outside the State, 33 exceeded the $2,000 mark.

AVERAGE EARNINGS PER HOUSEHOLD

Since these workers were employed in family groups, data on household earnings are more

TABLE 2. AVERAGE DAILY EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY WORKERS FROM SOUTH TEXAS BY LOCATION OF WORK, 1956

State	Average earnings per day
	Dollars
All states	5.93
Texas	5.14
Michigan	6.64
Colorado	5.35
Minnesota	7.34
Wisconsin	7.16
Washington	8.39
Ohio	6.84
California	8.84
Arizona	10.70
Idaho	6.20
Illinois	7.94
North Dakota	7.75
Other states[1]	5.76

[1]Includes some work in Mexico.

indicative of family income than are data on individual workers. Average earnings of the families for 1956 were $2,208 (Table 4). Intrastate families, however, averaged about $1,000 less than those who worked outside the State; $1,496, as compared with $2,465 for interstate families and $2,583 for those who migrated both in and out of the State.

Crew membership is declining. One reason for this may be that families who were members of crews earned $2,026 per year, while families who were not members earned $2,507. Part of this difference is explained by the fact that crews were more common in intrastate migration, where earnings are generally greater.

The advantage of large families is indicated by the data on earnings per household according to number of workers. One-worker families had total earnings of only $1,218, a second worker added $514 to the family total, while a third boosted the family income to $2,537. Families with six, seven, or eight workers averaged total earnings of around $4,000 or more. Data on the cost of maintenance of these children are not available, but a large number of workers in a family results in a real addition to total family purchasing power.

INCOME OF MIGRANT WORKERS COMPARED WITH NATIONAL AVERAGES

A comparison was made between the incomes of these households and those of all households in the United States. The median income of all households in the United States was well over twice that of the South Texas migrant households, $4,783 as compared with $2,256 (2). Rural farm households in the United States, however, had median incomes in 1956 of only $2,371. So there are many low-income families in the Nation in the same income bracket as the migrant workers; in fact, many of the cropper families average a good deal less but do not have the expense of migrating. Nonwhite farm families averaged $1,104 in that year. They also had no migrating expenses.

The average size of the Latin-American households was 6.5 persons as compared with an average of 3.3 persons for the Nation as a whole. Families in the United States with two workers had a median income of $5,576 in 1956, and those with three or more had $6,946.

INCOME AT THE HOME BASE

A major reason for low earnings in their home city was that more than half of the workers were out of the labor force when they were

TABLE 3. EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS BY FAMILY STATUS AND RANGE OF MOVEMENT, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

Family status and range of movement	Number and percentage of workers in each income group								
	All workers	Under $500		$500-900		$1000-1999		$2000 and over	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All workers	1,334	474	36	483	36	338	25	39	3
Family status									
Heads	410	44	11	152	37	182	44	32	8
Male	38	18	47	11	29	9	24		
Female	205	113	55	68	33	22	11	2	1
Wives									
School youth	157	99	63	52	33	6	4		
Male	124	91	74	29	23	4	3		
Female									
Nonschool youth	107	21	19	49	46	35	33	2	2
Male	81	27	33	36	44	16	20	2	2
Female									
Other persons	126	30	24	52	41	43	34	1	1
Male	86	31	36	34	40	21	24		
Female									
Range of movement									
Texas only	376	214	57	93	25	63	17	6	1
Outside Texas	464	123	27	169	36	154	33	18	4
Both in and out of Texas	494	137	28	221	45	121	24	15	3

TABLE 4. AVERAGE EARNINGS PER HOUSEHOLD BY RANGE OF MOVEMENT AND NUMBER OF WORKERS, MIGRATORY WORKERS, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

Type of household	Average earnings per household
	Dollars
All households	2,208
Range of movement	
Texas only	1,496
Outside Texas	2,465
In and out of Texas	2,583
Workers per household	
1	1,218
2	1,732
3	2,537
4	2,929
5	3,073
6	3,954
7	4,287
8	4,184

at home. This included practically all the housewives and school children and a high percentage of the other persons in the households.[2] Average home base earnings of those who did work were $470.

In the home-base cities, earnings varied to a large extent with distance from the Mexican border (Table 5). This was especially true for nonfarm jobs. Nonfarm workers in Crystal City and Robstown earned about $7 a day, while those in Eagle Pass averaged $3.20 and those in Laredo $2.73. Workers come from both sides of the international boundary, and this results in a wage scale that is partially adjusted to living costs in Mexico.

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN TEXAS

Earnings per day in Texas varied considerably. Those who worked in carrots and other vegetables earned around $3.50 to $4 per day (Table 6). Work in cotton is a step above "stoop" labor; it paid much better, around $5.50 per day. Those who were able to drive a truck or tractor received an average of $6.71 per day.

A pronounced shift toward nonfarm employment is explained by the fact that nonfarm jobs provided twice as much employment at a 50 percent higher wage. Unskilled jobs in restaurants, hotels and such paid low wages but were acceptable when a person was unable to do better. These paid around $4 per day. The lifting and loading jobs at storage plants and sawmills paid a little better, but most factory work and construction work paid more than $8.

[2]Some bias may have occurred in the results of this survey because families that had no financial reserves had either gone to a work area such as the Lower Rio Grande Valley or Florida or had gone to Mexico, where expenses were less.

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS OUTSIDE OF TEXAS

A job outside of Texas was regarded as an economic advancement. A few jobs, such as cotton chopping in Missouri and potato picking in Alabama, paid no better than the "stoop" labor jobs in Texas (Table 7). But most earnings at farmwork averaged about $6, $7 or $8 per day. In nonfarm work, the same job gradations occurred as in Texas, but the rates of pay were 20 to 50 percent higher (Table 8).

Migratory workers tend to seek the areas with the higher wage levels. Wages were comparatively low in the southeastern states and relatively few South Texas migrants went there to compete with the Negroes for employment. Wages were higher in the North and particularly in the Northwest, and these are the directions in which the Latin-Americans are moving.

Length of employment and earnings in some of the areas and crops were so small as not to justify a trip there; Alabama potatoes and Missouri and Mississippi cotton provided only 10 to 20 days of work. Some workers, however, earned $600 to $800 in a few months, particularly in the northwestern states.

PAY RATES OF MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

The most complicated type of job was the "thinning" of sugar beets. Some workers reported $10, $12 and $14 an acre for thinning sugar beets. From these amounts, the rate per acre ranged up to $22 and $23. The rate varied with the number and type of thinning and hoeing operations performed. Some workers fingerthinned the beets after crossblocking had been done by machine. Other workers did both the blocking and thinning. Other workers did the handthinning plus one, two or more handhoeings, all of which were a part of the "thinning" agreement. Hence the wide variation in rates. What might appear as a difference in rates from one sugar beet area to another was actually a difference in the type of operation performed. Consequently, variations in earnings per day as set forth in the preceding section are the best guide

TABLE 5. EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS AT THE HOME BASE, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

Home-base city	Total workers reporting	Average earnings at home base		
		Per worker	Per day worked	
		Who worked at home base	At nonfarm jobs	At farm jobs
		Dollars		
All cities	594	470	5.21	4.94
San Antonio	114	664	6.07	4.69
Crystal City	124	521	6.99	5.48
Eagle Pass	104	312	3.20	4.11
Laredo	45	294	2.73	4.02
Weslaco	118	460	4.33	5.01
Robstown	89	436	6.84	5.40

to differences in rates of pay. Wage rates are described in general terms rather than in detail. Exceptions are rates for chopping, pulling and picking cotton. These operations are pretty well standardized, yet local rates for picking are greatly affected by yield per acre, so even here it is hazardous to make a comparison from area to area without knowing all the factors involved.

In general, the jobs performed by the migratory workers were paid for on a piece-rate basis. The workers reported a total of 5,989 jobs worked at during the year, and 4 out of 5 of these were paid for on a piece-rate basis. The major exceptions were nonfarm jobs at the home base and on the road, cotton chopping and general farmwork, including loading and hauling harvested crops.

Most of the jobs paid for on an hourly or daily basis were located at the home base. Rates of pay for these jobs varied widely. The rate of pay for many service-type jobs was as low as $2 a day, while general farmwork paid $4, $5 or $6 a day, and construction work yielded from $0.75 to $2 an hour. The most frequent rate for chopping cotton was $0.50 or $0.60 an hour (Table 9).

The wide range in time rates indicates the wide range in abilities of the workers. A migrant who had recently come from Mexico might regard $0.40 an hour or $1.50 a day as adequate wages. But in order to receive $2 an hour on a construction job, workers would need to have attained some special skill and some knowledge of English.

Omitting sugar-beet and cotton operations, the rates most commonly reported are listed as follows:

Potatoes

Colorado	6 cents per half sack; 12-14 cents per full sack, 12-15 cents per hundredweight.
Idaho	9 cents per sack; 15 cents per hundredweight; 20-25 cents per hundredweight pick, load and haul.
Minnesota	65-75 cents per hour; 5-8 cents per bushel.
North Dakota	8-10 cents per bushel; 10 cents per sack.
Nebraska	7-9 cents per bushel; 12-16 cents per bushel pick, load and haul.

Onions

Colorado	14 cents per full sack.
Minnesota	10 cents per bushel; 70-75 cents per hour.
Wisconsin	75 cents per hour.
Michigan	75 cents per hour.

Tomatoes

Colorado	12 cents per box.
Indiana	10 cents per basket.
Ohio	11 cents per hamper.

Beans

Colorado	$2 per hundredweight.
Idaho	2-¼ cents per pound.
Minnesota	3 cents per pound; 60 cents per bushel.

Cherries

Michigan	50-60 cents per box; 2 cents per pound.
Wisconsin	20 cents per basket.

In contrast to these rates, nonfarm employment rates were more uniform. The most common rate for work in canneries and packing houses in all areas was $1 per hour, and nearly all construction work was $0.75 or $1 an hour. Rates of pay on service jobs were more variable. They ranged from $10 to $40 a week and from $0.45 to $1 per hour. Jobs in restaurants, hotels, laundries and other service establishments attract many new entrants from Mexico. They serve as a method of getting acquainted here and as a steppingstone toward higher paid employment in other fields.

Wage rates for pulling and picking cotton are shown in Table 10. Pulling rates started at $1 per 100 pounds of seed cotton and went as

TABLE 6. TYPES OF WORK DONE IN TEXAS, DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS, MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

Type of work	Average days worked	Average earnings per worker	Average earnings per worker per day
		— — Dollars — —	
Farmwork			
Cotton			
Chopping	44	243	5.52
Picking	46	247	5.37
Onions	58	222	3.83
Spinach	58	260	4.48
Carrots	78	259	3.32
Other vegetables	57	199	3.49
Other crops	65	282	4.34
Truck or tractor driver	84	564	6.71
Other farmwork	73	311	4.26
Nonfarmwork			
Construction work	84	682	8.12
Service work	79	319	4.04
Cannery	70	488	6.97
Packinghouse	83	490	5.90
Ice or storage plant	84	376	4.48
Sawmill	29	135	4.66
Other factory work	71	633	8.92
Professional services	62	336	5.42
Transportation	85	452	5.32
Other nonfarmwork	90	564	6.27

TABLE 7. TYPES OF FARMWORK DONE, DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS OUTSIDE TEXAS, BY STATES, MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

State and type of work	Average days worked	Average earnings per worker	Average earnings per worker per day
		— — — Dollars — — —	
Alabama			
Potatoes	20	71	3.55
Arizona			
Cotton—chopping	73	666	9.12
—picking	34	366	10.76
Arkansas			
Cotton—picking	35	235	6.71
Truck driver—farm	13	100	7.69
California			
Sugar beets	69	600	8.70
Vegetable crops	60	522	8.70
Fruit crops	88	623	7.08
General farmwork	136	1,700	12.50
Colorado			
Sugar beets	74	375	5.07
Potatoes	72	519	7.21
Beans	28	131	4.68
Other vegetables	30	167	5.57
Delaware			
Vegetables	47	340	7.23
Florida			
Tomatoes	63	392	6.22
Other vegetables	167	752	4.50
Idaho			
Sugar beets	49	299	6.10
Potatoes	34	248	7.29
Onions	68	276	4.06
Other crops	10	80	8.00
Illinois			
Tomatoes	39	319	8.18
Onions	84	473	5.63
Other vegetables	58	433	7.47
Other farmwork	103	1,013	9.83
Indiana			
Tomatoes	38	232	6.11
Other crops	35	231	6.60
General farmwork	16	100	6.25
Iowa			
Potatoes	28	164	5.86
Other farmwork	78	305	3.91
Kansas			
All crops	35	352	10.06
Michigan			
Sugar beets	53	342	6.45
Tomatoes	43	342	7.95
Onions	82	478	5.83
Strawberries	24	194	8.08
Cucumbers	37	178	4.81
Asparagus	30	150	5.00
Other vegetables	64	449	7.02
Cherries	29	210	7.24
Other fruit	15	115	7.67
Minnesota			
Sugar beets	55	424	7.71
Potatoes	49	235	4.80
Beans	74	502	6.78
Onions	86	588	6.84
Other vegetables	33	259	7.85
Corn	22	148	6.73
General farmwork	70	522	7.46
Mississippi			
Cotton—picking	10	50	5.00
Missouri			
Cotton—chopping	11	36	3.27
—picking	21	130	6.19
Montana			
Sugar beets	54	299	5.54
Nebraska			
Sugar beets, et al	43	275	6.40
New Mexico			
Cotton—picking	23	178	7.74
Other farmwork	39	161	4.13

high as $2. Three-fourths of the reports, however, were for $1.50. Picking rates started at $2, but some workers received $4. The most common rate was $2. The rate varied considerably from one cotton area to another. Rates in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico were on the some general level, while those in Arizona, Arkansas and Missouri were considerably higher.

ROLE AND INCOME OF CREW LEADERS

In most areas and jobs in which crew leaders were involved, the workers were employed on a piece-rate basis negotiated between the farmer and the crew leader, Figure 3. The major exception was that of employees of canning companies who were paid the legal minimum wage scale for cannery employees, $1 per hour. Workers in sugar beets also were paid according to a government scale, but this permitted some bargaining, because of differences in field conditions. Payment was on a per acre basis according to established standards, varying from area

TABLE 7. TYPES OF FARMWORK DONE, DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS OUTSIDE TEXAS, BY STATES, MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

State and type of work	Average days worked	Average earnings per worker	Average earnings per worker per day
		— — — Dollars — — —	
North Dakota			
Sugar beets	48	356	7.42
Potatoes	32	269	8.41
Ohio			
Sugar beets	92	530	5.76
Potatoes	37	301	8.14
Tomatoes	38	270	7.11
Other crops	32	174	5.44
Oklahoma			
Cotton	33	190	5.76
Oregon			
Sugar beets	50	268	5.36
Onions	97	860	8.87
Other vegetables	57	623	10.93
Hops	46	421	9.15
South Dakota			
Potatoes	30	210	7.00
Utah			
Tomatoes	17	112	6.59
Other crops	42	305	7.26
Washington			
Sugar beets	74	692	9.35
Peas	78	658	8.44
Asparagus	58	409	7.05
Other vegetables	65	588	9.05
Apples	18	180	10.00
Hops	112	781	6.97
General farmwork	137	1,580	11.53
Wisconsin			
Sugar beets	64	461	7.20
Potatoes	33	188	5.70
Tomatoes	107	525	4.91
Beans	23	123	5.35
Onions	73	528	7.23
Cucumbers	21	123	5.86
Other vegetables	88	701	7.97
Apples	25	175	7.00
Cherries	26	161	6.19
Corn	82	698	8.51

to area and as to the exact type of operation performed.

Some crew leaders complained that farmers were trying to cut labor costs and that neither the workers nor the crew leaders were making as much money as they did several years ago. Some said that imported Mexican Nationals were being employed by farmers as a means of lowering wage rates and that these workers also were making work more irregular. Furthermore, it was stated the expense to crew leaders for such items as gasoline, tires, repairs and new equipment had doubled, while they had no way to raise their rates accordingly.

A study of the rates for several crops leads to the conclusion that the crew leader has done somewhat better for himself than he has for the worker. Taking cotton as an illustration, the traditional rate to the crew leader has been $0.25 per 100 pounds of seed cotton for hauling to the gin. The rate to the worker has been around $2 to $2.75 per 100 for picking cotton and around $1.50 to $1.75 for snapping it. Recently, crew leaders have protested against the $0.25 rate, and some have been able to obtain $0.50 for hauling. The wage rates for picking and pulling cotton have been declining, however, ever since 1951.[3]

Rates to workers and crew leaders per 100 pounds for picking and pulling cotton were reported by crew leaders as follows:

Workers' rates	Crew leaders' rates	Times reported
$1.25	$0.25	1
1.50	.25	3
1.50	.50	3
1.75	.25	4
1.75	.50	1
2.00	.25	1
2.00	.50	1
2.50	.35 (Arizona)	1

Confusion in the cotton wage-rate structure is indicated by the fact that some crew leaders now get one-third of the rate paid to the worker, while others get as little as one-eighth.

While sugar beet workers are paid a rate set by government officials after a public hearing, the rates to crew leaders are still a matter of individual negotiation. Some crew leaders were paid a commission of $2 per acre for all acreages handled by members of their crew, others were paid $10 per day for hauling the workers to the field, and still others were paid $1 per acre for supervision. Many, however, simply worked in the field as head of their family and received no extra pay.

[3]For average cotton-picking rates by states, see Farm Labor, Agricultural Marketing Service, November 1957. The 1951 rate in Texas averaged $3 per hundredweight; the 1956 rate, $2.65. Rates reported by the crew leaders are well below these levels, but most reported rates were for pulling rather than picking cotton.

TABLE 8. EARNINGS AND NONFARM EMPLOYMENT OF MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS, OUTSIDE TEXAS, BY STATE AND TYPE OF WORK, 1956

Location and type of work	Average days worked	Average earnings	Average earnings per day
		— — — Dollars — — —	
California			
Canning	105	1,348.40	12.84
Illinois			
Packinghouse	200	2,600.00	13.00
Other factory	82	692.00	8.44
Indiana			
Packinghouse	49	288.00	5.88
Michigan			
Packinghouse	85	650.00	7.65
Cannery	72	500.00	6.34
Railroad	96	1,152.00	12.00
Minnesota			
Cannery	17	117.00	6.88
Other factory	12	150.00	12.50
Oregon			
Cannery	70	840.00	12.00
Utah			
Cannery	63	500.00	7.94
Washington			
Cannery	34	256.00	7.53
Housework	134	854.00	6.37
Other service	100	482.00	4.82
Wisconsin			
Packinghouse	124	1,356.00	10.94
Cannery	39	322.00	8.26
Other factory	80	578.00	7.22

In general, crew leaders had had little experience with social security up to the time of these interviews. Four were aware that they would have to do something about it in 1957. But in 1956, none of them had made any deductions for this purpose. Eleven, however, had worked for farmers who planned to make some social security deduction.

TABLE 9. WAGE RATES REPORTED FOR CHOPPING COTTON, BY MIGRATORY FARMWORKERS, SOUTH TEXAS, 1956

Rate	Workers reporting, by states		
	All states	Texas	Other[1]
All reports	150	141	9
Per hour			
$0.40	5	5	—
.50	40	37	3
.55	11	11	—
.60	40	38	2
.65	5	5	—
.75	4	4	—
Per day			
$4.00	18	17	1
4.50	2	2	—
5.00	6	4	2
5.50	9	9	—
6.75	7	7	—
9.00	1	—	1
Per week			
$25.00	2	2	--

[1]Arizona, Arkansas, Missouri.

Figure 3. Typical crew leader with truck and crew.

TRENDS IN MIGRATORY FARM LABOR

The patterns for migration of farm labor in the midcontinent area are still undergoing adaptations to changing conditions. Both mechanization and the importation of foreign labor are reducing the demand for domestic migrant labor. Also, the permanent settlement of former migrants in the work areas and the growth of the day-haul system are changing work patterns. As a result, the worker cannot always plan his work route on the basis of last year's experience, or he may lose a large amount of time.

The supply of domestic labor that is available for movement to the seasonal work areas in the midcontinent area is also diminishing. As Latin-American workers in South Texas are able to qualify for and find local permanent employment either at the home base or in the work areas, they are lost as potential migrant workers.

Even though both the demand for and the supply of migrant labor is diminishing, we cannot expect that the two trends will be in balance. Changes in supply and demand tend to be local in nature and to vary from place to place, from crop to crop and from year to year. Changes may increase the demand in a local area for example, when new lands are brought under irrigation or there is a shift from livestock to fruit or vegetable production. Under these circumstances, an improved guidance program for migrant workers is necessary if they are to avoid involuntary unemployment.

FUTURE DEMAND FOR TEXAS MIGRATORY LABOR

Demand for migratory workers in the midcontinent area is dropping sharply. The most rapid decline has been in the demand for workers in sugar beets. Harvest operations are almost completely mechanized and recent developments will soon lead to the mechanization of thinning and hoeing (3). Recruitment of a labor supply to meet the high labor needs of this crop has been basic in the movement of South Texas workers to other states. In earlier years, cotton was picked by hand. Now, many commercial growers have their fields picked over once by hand, then complete their harvest with mechanical strippers. This practice cuts the length of the handpicking season in half and means added work stops for the migratory worker. Other operators run mechanical pickers one or more times through their fields and avoid the use of hand laborers entirely (4). The cotton producing area

TABLE 10. WAGE RATES REPORTED FOR PICKING AND ... TEX... ...UTH

Rate per hundredweight	Wor... All states	Texas	Okla...
Pulling cotton			
All reports	1190	1090	
$1.00	5	5	
1.25	64	60	
1.40	15	15	
1.50	867	792	
1.55	5	5	
1.60	15	14	
1.65	36	36	
1.75	183	163	
Picking cotton			
All reports	253	135	
$2.00	112	93	
2.10	8	8	
2.25	29	21	
2.50	19	7	
2.75	6		
3.00	60	7	
3.20	7		
3.50	9		
4.00	3		

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in the United States is shifting rapidly from the areas in which hand labor is still used to those that are the most highly mechanized.

Mechanization also is replacing labor in potato and snap-bean harvesting. Hand labor soon may be used only in seasons when weather puts machine use at a disadvantage. From two-thirds to three-fourths of the work that the migrants now do by hand may be done by machine within the next 5 to 10 years.

The harvesting of soft, perishable fruits and berries will not be mechanized so readily, and the production of these crops in the midcontinent area is increasing.

Former migrants also are reducing the demand for transient labor by settling in the work areas. They establish a supply of local labor that can make its own job contacts or operate through the day-haul system. Substituting local for migratory labor is slow, especially since many former migrants probably will shift into permanent nonfarm employment. Some ex-migrants who have had a taste of nonfarm employment lose interest in seasonal farmwork before they attain any skill along nonfarm lines. As a result, they may go through a period in which their productivity and hence their income are low in both types of work.

Demand for domestic labor in the midcontinent area is being affected by the importation of foreign labor, which offers stiff competition. All are able-bodied males, screened for physical fitness and agricultural experience before they enter. Recruitment problems are at a minimum. These workers can be ordered and returned as they are needed and in as large numbers as are needed. The problem of housing is minimal, and problems of child care, child labor and education are avoided completely. Under these circumstances, many farm employers show such a preference for imported foreign labor that it is difficult for governmental agencies to reserve employment opportunities for the citizen workers.

The U. S. Department of Labor, however, has an extensive program to keep importation to the minimum number needed to supplement citizen workers for seasonal farm tasks. The Department makes surveys in the areas reported to have shortages of labor to determine labor requirements for the major seasonal operations and the supply of citizen labor to meet these needs. Surveys also are made of wage rates, so they will not be depressed by bringing in an oversupply of foreign workers. The operation of this program is difficult because it depends partly on cooperation from growers who have a significant financial interest in an ample supply of labor. Growers do not know ahead of a harvest season how rapidly a crop will ripen, nor how favorable the weather will be. A regard for their own interests, therefore, calls for having more workers than are barely necessary to do the job. Hence, they make a liberal statement of their needs.

FUTURE SUPPLY OF MIGRATORY LABOR

The future supply of migratory labor depends on and is influenced by all of the major factors that influence our economy. The factors that affect the supply can be grouped under three headings: general economic conditions, technology and education.

The general health of our national and State economy affects the future supply of migratory workers because it determines the variety and number of nonagricultural jobs that will be available to them. It is reasonable to assume that the Nation will continue to have the same general level of employment that it has enjoyed since World War II. If this continued high level of employment is realized, the supply of migratory agricultural workers will decrease. Migratory agricultural work, to a large extent, is a marginal type of employment that is engaged in by people who lack more desirable employment alternatives. Under conditions of full employment, there will be a study movement of the more competent, better educated, younger and more talented migrants into more permanent jobs. Under these conditions, the rate of movement for migrants into other and more remunerative types of employment will depend primarily on two factors. One is the rate of adoption of labor-saving practices by agricultural producers. The other concerns the developments in the field of education of the migrants.

Mechanization of farm operations is continuing at an accelerated pace and will result in such irregular seasonal employment that workers will seek jobs that offer a larger measure of economic security. It is not possible to predict the exact rate of adoption of labor-saving practices and machinery, as this rate depends upon a number of factors that are not easily defined and measured. There is always a considerable lag between the development of a labor-saving device which is economically practical and the general adoption of that practice by most producers. The replacement of a hand-labor operation by a machine for a whole industry usually takes a decade or two.

The rate at which migratory agricultural workers find better and steadier employment depends mainly on their ability to speak English and on their educational background (5). In the past, when retardation of Spanish-speaking children was 1 to 4 years and schools were nonexistent or segregated, the Spanish-speaking part of the population was seriously handicapped and, in general, prevented from entering employment in a variety of jobs and occupations. This situation has been changing rapidly during the past 20 years. Since World War II, almost all South Texas schools have had compulsory school-attend-

ance laws enforced to a greater extent; and techniques have been worked out for eliminating retardation caused by language difficulty. In the future, a method of teaching basic English to Spanish-speaking pre-first graders probably will be incorporated into the State school system.

These three changes—enforcement of school-attendance laws, better school opportunities and facilities and improved teaching techniques—should prepare the Spanish-speaking people for jobs in all parts of the economy. This improved education should permit them to take regular full-time jobs instead of migratory work.

Importation of foreign labor also affects the supply of citizen migratory workers. The citizen workers frequently are resentful when they find that the jobs in the areas in which they had formerly worked are now being handled by imported foreign labor.[4] Importation appears to be the most effective method of reducing the number of citizen migrants. Experience in other areas indicates that when citizen workers once give over to imported foreign workers on employment in a certain area or operation, it is almost impossible to get them to return.[5]

The continued movement of workers across the Mexican border also affects the labor situation in this area. Many who have learned the advantages of working in the United States, possibly by being imported foreign workers, wish to return. Only a limited number can come in on a contractual basis, so many others come in either as "wetbacks" or as immigrants applying for citizenship. One of their best employment alternatives in this country will be as migratory farmworkers. So we can expect a replenishment of the migratory labor force from this source for a number of years to come. There is always a possibility that either the Mexican or the U. S. Government might reduce, or eliminate, legal movement to this country; but this is only a possibility as long as the movement is to the mutual advantage of both countries.

The general upward rise in education, wage levels and standards of living that is occurring among workers in this area and in the country eventually will reduce and systematize the movements of these people. A program of guided movement of migratory agricultural workers will result in more efficient utilization of a smaller labor force.

[4]Complaint about imported workers taking their jobs was general among the workers interviewed.

[5]For experience of citrus producers in the Los Angeles are
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